



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE HISTORICITY OF THE FIRST PATRIARCH. II

PROFESSOR EDUARD KÖNIG

Bonn, Germany

4. During this argumentation a fourth query has arisen and now impetuously demands full attention. This new question leads back our spirits to the historic beginnings of other nations and permits the investigation to consider the Germans, and the personality Mannus, son of the god Tuisto, the alleged founder of the tribal system.<sup>17</sup> Or stress may be laid on the fact that the Hellenes traced their race from one great grandsire Hállēn, who had two sons, Aiolos and Doros, and two grandsons, Achaïos and Ion. Now I shall freely admit that no one will ever fall into the error of finding historic individuals in the bearers of these names.<sup>18</sup> But in spite of this admission I am unable to subscribe to the general statement which has been deduced from those Greek names, as follows: "Never do races call themselves after single individuals but everywhere the name of the progenitor is first of all an epitome, a personification of the whole tribe."<sup>18</sup> Here again we have that same "never" which was discussed above (at the beginning of paragraph 3) together with that ethnographic axiom. What is there represented as universally valid, first of all, must not be such and cannot be verified as such. Secondly, I raise the counter-question: Are experiences and acts related of Mannus or Hállēn or even Aiolos, etc., like those recounted of Abraham and Isaac, etc.? How simple and human are the stories preserved of the two latter! They tell of a birthplace, of father and the paternal family, then of a migration from the immediate relatives, of a very natural roaming from place to place in the new homeland, of an emigration from this country because of famine, etc., until death and burial. No! the form of Abraham is no bloodless phantom and it is above all no mere ideal protrait.

<sup>17</sup> This Tacitus affirms in his *Germania*, chap. ii.

<sup>18</sup> Cornill, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (1898), p. 32; Eng. Trans., *History of the People of Israel* (1898), p. 30; pub. by the Open Court Pub. Co.

But do not men think of him as a mere stolid emigrant roving from place to place in Palestine? Do we not read how he must contend with his neighbors for the springs? How humiliating is particularly the scene where he must beg a place to put his dead. Human weaknesses were not suppressed in the records about him. The old Hebrew annals did not, even with reference to him, their prince, carry through a systematic obliteration of the weaknesses in the characters of their heroes. A purely *fabricated* patriarchal biography would have been dressed up *very differently*. We all know what brilliant forms spring into being, when the poetic fancy takes up palette and brush. How striking but true is this in Abraham's case! For the spirit desirous of recasting tradition crept into his story later. He was exalted to a kingship over Damascus; for the Roman sources read: "Over Damascus there ruled as kings Azulus, soon after Adores, Abraham, and Israhel."<sup>19</sup> Such an embellished report of the first patriarch is encountered in the writings of Josephus and others. Then too, in the Qor'ân (Sura, 6, pp. 74 ff.) Abraham is made to say to his father Azar:<sup>20</sup> "Are ye accepting idols for gods? According to my way of thinking thou and thy people are in manifest error." What a perversion of the plain fact that Abraham—without doing violence to his former religious convictions—quietly obeyed the inner impulse, which drove him out on a new path so important for the history of religion! In other Jewish sources it is chronicled that the Chaldean astrologers had prophesied to their sovereign Nimrod that a son of Terah's would become dangerous to his sway and consequently the latter had concealed his son thirteen years. What a misplacement of the religious events in the political sphere and what a trimming-up of actuality with sensational frippery! On the other hand, how chaste and self-contained are the Old Testament narratives about the patriarchs! In very deed—which recently has not been recognized—in the old-Israelitish tradition there are no miracles "made to order" accredited to these patriarchs!

5. Indeed the eyes of many recent historians have a much higher

<sup>19</sup> Justinus, *Historiae Philippicae*, Book XXXVI, chap. ii.

<sup>20</sup> This name, long obscure, was interpreted by S. Fraenkel in the *Zeitschr. d. deut. morgenl. Gesellschaft* (1902), p. 72, thus: "It is the *Eliezer* apocopated in form through the confusion of the prophet."

goal than the ambition correctly to appreciate in its individuality the field of investigation just before them. Their chief aim is to see whether they cannot compare old-Israelitish history with other phases of historical life, if indeed they cannot bring them both to a common level. In many cases the result of this search is that they bring Abraham and the patriarchs in a general way into relationship with mythological conceptions of western Asia and particularly of Babylonia.

Thus they proceed on the theory that Abraham and the other two patriarchs were linked with certain sacred shrines, Abraham with Hebron, Isaac with Beersheba, and Jacob with Shechem. From this the conclusion is drawn that the three patriarchs were what is customarily designated as the *genii loci* or local deities. Then again it is urged that in Abraham's life obviously two rôles can be distinguished. At one time he plays the part of one of the two Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux; this is the case where he is linked with Lot. The other part he is supposed to assume when he is the brother and husband of his sister and wife, Sarah. Inasmuch as, according to the latest interpreters of the Old Testament, she is the goddess Ishtar (i. e., Astarte), as the latter appears in the Babylonian mythology, the divinity, for whom he in this second rôle was conceived to pose as the "heroic precipitate" (*Niederschlag*) who was essentially the moon-god.<sup>21</sup>

This hypothesis contains weak spots apparent even when viewed alone. Is the lowest layer in the foundation of this new structure safe? According to the authoritative documents are the patriarchs adjudged and honored anything like tutelary *genii* or the local divinities among the Romans?<sup>22</sup>

In the old Hebrew historic materials there are a hundred counter-proofs, but not one direct proof, since the patriarchs in their whole manner of life may be characterized as human. Not even a single indication of ancestor worship is exhibited in any of the patriarchal accounts. Or perchance will someone call to mind that an oak stood beside the grave of Deborah, Rebecca's nurse (Gen. 35:8), and will he seek to prove that the oak could have been a "holy tree"? Then we are forced to reply that the oak stood there before Deborah's burial,

<sup>21</sup> These are theories of H. Winckler in his *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Vol. II (1900), pp. 23, 284.

<sup>22</sup> Vergil's *Aeneid*, v:95: "Incertus geniumne loci, famulumne parentis esse putet."

that it was called the "oak of weeping" (not the oak of worship), and that the nurse of Rebecca was certainly no "good subject" to become later the object of patriarchal veneration.

But perhaps that general comparison of the patriarchs with Babylonian divinities possesses more merits in single portions of the narratives in point. Let us note what advantages are urged in favor of this new point of view.

Now, relative to the first patriarch, with whom alone this essay wishes to deal, the latest writers to outline the history of Israel, just alluded to, lay special stress on the words: "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right, etc." (Am. R. V.). We already know on what occasion Abraham spoke these words to Lot, and we cannot do otherwise than find in these sentences an utterance very natural and in every way appropriate to that particular crisis. But what does the most modern historian of Israel do? He connects those words with the mythological conception that Castor and Pollux "never could be together; if one is in the under world, then the other is with Zeus."<sup>23</sup> This combination of the old Israelitish tradition with Greek myth has miscarried completely, since Abraham and Lot were together at the first. Indeed, they were fellow-emigrants bound for Canaan. And were they not together again after the territorial demarcation of their respective pasturage (Gen. 13:9)? And this was again the case when the patriarch had rescued his kinsman from the hands of those enemies from the east (14:16). Besides, two brothers of Abraham appear in the record. What right have we to transform these men into twins, viz.: "Abraham and Lot, the uncle and the nephew"?<sup>24</sup>

Another trace of the mythological character of Abraham has been discovered, supposedly in the comment (Gen. 20:12), where he and his wife are spoken of as brother and sister. Here, they exclaim,<sup>25</sup> is clearly expressed the fact that he was the spouse of Ishtar or Astarte,

<sup>23</sup> Thus H. Winckler, *Himmel- und Weltenbild der Babylonier als Grundlage der Mythologie aller (!) Völker*, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> The ordinary mortal truly cannot comprehend how again recently, in spite of the plain situation pictured in the words, "If thou wilt take the left hand," etc., "twins-Dioscuri-motive" can be characterized as applicable to the stories about Abraham.

<sup>25</sup> Winckler, *Himmel- u. Weltenbild*, etc., p. 38.

because the latter according to Babylonian mythology had also married her brother. But in this reasoning an important circumstance in the passage cited was overlooked. His words to Abimelech are these: "And moreover she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife" (Am. R. V.). Thus the woman whom Abraham had married was his half-sister or step-sister and marriage with one so related was, in polygamous circles, comparatively speaking quite natural, because in this environment each wife with her children made up a separate group within the collective family. How directly that truth is presented to the eye in that scene where first Leah with her children and then Rachel with her son Joseph passed by Esau as two distinct and separate companies (33:6 f.)! The unfortunate princess Tamar in her request to Ammon (II Sam. 13:13) presupposes the possibility of a marriage between a half-brother and half-sister. Consequently these critics have not the slightest justification in treating the nuptial tie between the first patriarch and his step-sister as a mark of the mythological strain in the treatment of this life-story.

Just now Abraham is compared to the moon because the latter is also "the wanderer." Perchance this motive hovered in the mind of the writer at the naming of the stages through which the first patriarch journeyed. "Abraham wandered from east to west as does the moon." Harran, the city of the god Bêl-Harran, signifies "way." Gerar, where he tarried as a stranger, makes a play on the word girru ("path").<sup>26</sup>

But in the first place was Abraham necessarily viewed as a "wanderer" by the Old Testament narrator, so that in consequence he could be brought into conjunction with the moon? At the very asking this question is to be denied, because many other persons also undertook long pilgrimages according to ancient records, as, for example, Nimrod or Terah. Indeed, for the Israelites the reason for considering Abraham "a wanderer" would be all the less imperative, because not he but his father Terah took the initiative at the emigration from Chaldea and the son was only taken along (11:31). Besides, the text neither intimates nor permits the thought that for Israel the removal from Harran fell under the head of a further "migration." This

<sup>26</sup> A. Jeremias, *Das A. T. im Lichte des alten Orients* (1906), p. 341.

exodus from native land, kindred, the paternal roof (12:1), is for the Old Testament scribe much more characteristic of an enthusiastic self-devotion to a divine stimulus. With this interpretation of the term migration (12:1) before the mind—which in truth is the only one sanctioned by the text—should a “specialist” ever have stumbled on a “moon-motive”? The supposition is absolutely monstrous. Secondly, of what significance to the Old Testament biographer was the coincidence that Abraham traveled away from a center of moon worship? This writer put his departure from Harran into the narration, only because it meant the severance of all ties that bound him to the religious standards of his fathers.<sup>27</sup> With this view of the matter, should the annalist who chronicles the hegira from Harran necessarily bring Abraham into correlation with the moon? No! neither to the scribe nor to the reader of that account can any such intellectual necessity be ascribed. Thirdly, the signification “way” for the name Harran is far from being well substantiated in the Hebrew, and just the same may be predicated of the meaning “path” attributed to the name Gerar. So much the less, then, is there any ground to assume that these places, during the life of the first patriarch, were thus designated, because to the intellect he symbolized the moon and “like the moon must perforce wander from east to west”?

These data yield again the conclusion that the trustworthiness of Abraham's history is undermined, if it ought to be set forth with careful attention to “mythological” or “astral” motives.

But finally even in the name of the first patriarch there is no ground for the new presentation. In the book last cited (p. 332) this affirmation is made: “The root conception of Ab, i. e., heavenly Father, in the appellation Ab-ram is akin to *moon*.” But this cannot be thus decided with any degree of confidence or even probability. Since the name Ab-ram is to be derived like its nearest Hebrew analogies, and this form of the name is the shortened form of the original name Abiram, as the name was actually pronounced by the Hebrews in the case of persons less noted and therefore rarely mentioned (Num. 16:1, etc.), so Abiner and Abner remain in fact side by side as the proper and later form of exactly the same proper name.<sup>28</sup> But this

<sup>27</sup> This is the united testimony of Gen. 12:1; Josh. 24:2, etc.

<sup>28</sup> This point is exhaustively treated in my book, *Neueste Prinzipien der alttestamentlichen Kritik* (pub. by Ed. Runge), pp. 64 ff.

name Abiram signifies "my father exalted or eminent," and thus the son of a distinguished father could just as well be known as the offspring of another man, this time in the aristocracy, and could receive the name Abinadab, "my father is free-born or noble." Indeed the cognomen Abi-ramu appears in the Babylonian-Assyrian as the name of common people, for example the eponymic official exercising authority in the year 667-666.<sup>29</sup> In addition the name "field of Abram" was found in an Egyptian list concerning an expedition against Palestine.<sup>30</sup>

6. The comparative method, this pet of modern science, naturally calls for recognition in the sphere of biblical history. But as everywhere else in the application of this comparative method, one must also here, when making comparisons in the field of biblical antiquities, guard against the temptation of confounding "mere resemblance" with "identity." This (to be sure) self-evident verity must nevertheless again be reiterated with special emphasis, when finally in the sixth place the objections will be considered because of which the historicity of the first patriarch from the religious point of view can or ought to be placed in doubt.

a) But to begin with, it can and must be accomplished after the same manner in which one now hears of the "religion of Abraham's servants."<sup>31</sup> There one reads that the tradition brings the movement of the Abraham band into close connection with the two celebrated shrines of the moon-god (p. 331), and that "the roving about of this band is in reality a reformatory movement, protesting against the religious degeneration of the ruling class" (p. 333).

But the sources by no means suffer the person and mission of Abraham to be thus swallowed up by this troop composed of his servants.<sup>32</sup> Again they do not at all bring his migration—about which alone we are concerned, if the spiritual-historical result is kept in view—into connection with the two sacred shrines of the moon-cult, but rather, if I may so express myself, into disassociation from them.

<sup>29</sup> *Keilinschriften und Altes Testament* (1903), p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> W. Spiegelberg, *Aegyptologische Glossen zum A. T.* (1904), p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> A. Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des alten Orients* (1906), p. 211.

<sup>32</sup> The widely accepted hypothesis that the names of the patriarchs and the sons of Jacob rest supposedly on the later personification of the tribes, is thoroughly treated in my book: *"Neueste Prinzipien der alttest. Kritik"*, pp. 37-63.



They also know nothing of the inference that "the migration of Abraham's household was in truth a radical effort toward a reformation." If men wish to speak thereof, then please let them drop the appellation "Abraham"! According to the original documents his place in the history of religion rests not on a reformation but it ushers in a new epoch. His abiding significance does not even lie in the predication of monotheism—this false observation which in these days one so constantly hears affirmed. If this were true, then, to be sure, "Abraham's household" could be made the custodians of those stoutly maintained yet never securely established "monotheistic tendencies" in Babylonia. No! His signification for the history of religion is based on the communion with God founded on his personal call which cut him off intrinsically from national ties, but yet in their place bound him to the God-head and exalted him to the place of first citizen in a kingdom of grace destined ultimately to encircle the globe.

b) Certain deductions in the field of the history of religion supposedly put the historical reality of the first patriarch under suspicion. This some think ought to be done—some few who hold that the religion proper of Israel may not even be dated from the days of Abraham and desire at the same time to derive it by a natural process of evolution. This group of modern Old Testament students, to say the least, allows the question to remain befogged as to whether Abraham originally designated a swelling tide of humanity (*Völkerwelle*) or a conception of Deity. In any event on this point the religious achievements of an Abraham—even if he did, as reported, live as the leader of a tribe—are esteemed so lightly that they could never become a memorial of his existence in history.

Again, these critics believe<sup>33</sup> that good evidence favors them in maintaining that the patriarchs espoused fetishism. And still there is not found in all the source narratives on the life of Abraham the slightest trace of an idol—this too is exceedingly remarkable. There are those who wish to discover a worship of fetishes on the part of Jacob, when, after that dream of a ladder extending to heaven, he set up and anointed the stone on which his head had rested. But in the first place, the startled outcry of the patriarch is not, "How terrible is this stone!" but, "How terrible is this place!" Secondly, Jacob

<sup>33</sup> E. g., Stade, *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, I (1905), p. 48.

named not the stone but "this place" Bethel ("House of God") and said of the stone only: "This stone shall become a house of God." Thirdly, it is related of Jacob (35:1 ff.) that he ordered the idols buried which the members of his household had brought along from Mesopotamia. And still supposedly the same chronicler reported that this very person had erected a fetish. No! there is really too much confusion attributed by this hypothesis to biblical writers.

This method and result are the less intelligible because Wellhausen the principal representative of this company of Old Testament scholars has for the second time<sup>34</sup> openly admitted that from this point of view he could not give an adequate reply to the question, why the Moabite god Chemosh was not exalted to be the God of righteousness and the Creator of heaven and earth? Now if the principle of derivation from natural causes admittedly does not successfully lead to the elucidation of Israel's position in the history of religion, then the method itself must give way. The guiding minds in Israel well understood why the God whom they proclaimed was exalted above the national deity sacred to Moab. In addition Israel's leading spirits contended that the history of true religion began with the call of Abraham, even if this religion—for the education of Israel and all mankind—had still to pass through further development.

Consequently we may affirm that the historicity of the first patriarch still stands unshaken. All the stormy blasts which of late have beaten with fury against that oak have not been able to tear its roots loose from their solid foundation in history. Even today we have no occasion to discuss the migration or the religion of "Abraham's household." We need not; indeed, we dare not. The sources, remaining steadfast through all the (of course necessary) overturning of the old basal conceptions in history give us still the right to discuss the individual personality of Abraham, the first citizen in the kingdom of true religion, strong in faith and approved in obedience. Indeed, these ancient documents by their very contents lay upon us the duty thus to speak. Even in the twentieth century the tradition is still well based on the testimony of those who in the past centuries hailed Abraham as the ally and friend of God.

<sup>34</sup> In *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, V, 4 (1906), p. 15. Some time before he made the same avowal in *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (1901), p. 36.